

SHOULDER TRAUMA

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Trauma to the shoulder is common. Injuries range from a separated shoulder resulting from a fall onto the shoulder to a high-speed car accident that fractures the shoulder blade (scapula) or collar bone (clavicle). One thing is certain: everyone injures his or her shoulder at some point in life. Fractures of the clavicle or the proximal humerus can be caused by a direct blow to the area from a fall, collision, or motor vehicle accident.

Because the scapula is protected by the chest and surrounding muscles, it is not easily fractured. Therefore, fractures of the scapula are usually caused by high-energy trauma, such as a high speed motor vehicle accident. Scapula fractures are often associated with injuries to the chest.

Symptoms of fractures about the shoulder are related to the specific type of fracture. Pain, Swelling and bruising, Inability to move the shoulder, A grinding sensation when the shoulder is moved,

Diagnosis: Most fractures are diagnosed with X-rays of the area and by physical examination. Sometimes, additional imaging techniques, such as computed tomography, are necessary.

Treatment: Most clavicle fractures can be treated without surgery. Surgery is necessary when there is a compound fracture that has broken through the skin or the bone is severely out of place. Surgery typically involves fixing of the fracture with plates and screws or rods inside the bone. Most fractures of the scapula can be treated without surgery. Treatment involves immobilization with a sling or shoulder immobilizer, icing, and pain medications. The patient will be examined for additional injuries.

About 10 % to 20 % of scapula fractures need surgery. Fractures that need surgery usually have fracture fragments involving the shoulder joint or there is an additional fracture of the clavicle. Surgery involves fixation of the fracture fragments with plates and screws. Life after a shoulder fracture, separation, or dislocation can be greatly affected for several weeks or even months. Most shoulder injuries whether treated surgically or nonsurgically require a period of immobilization followed by rehabilitation.

If the injury was not severe, there is fairly rapid improvement and return of function after the first 4 to 6 weeks. Shoulder exercises, usually as part of a supervised physical therapy program, are usually necessary. Exercises decrease stiffness, improve range of motion, and help the patient regain muscle strength.

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